DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 656 EA 018 031

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TITLE	Partners in Education: Project Summary.
INSTITUTION	Lancaster City School District, Pa.
PUB DATE	Jul 84
NOTE	3p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National School Public Relations Association (Seattle, WA, July 2-5, 1984).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Involvement; *Cooperative Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; *School Business Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Lancaster School District PA; *Partners in Education

ABSTRACT

Partners in Education is a partnership program involving the School District of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and the local community, businesses, and industry. The schools receive assistance in the form of time, services, and expertise; the cooperating businesses and industry receive educational services to meet their needs. The program's overall goal is to develop a closer working relationship among the participating agencies, with the focus on the relationship itself rather than on the dollar value of the goods and services involved. The planning process for the program included identifying areas suited to cooperative effort, establishing partnership procedures, and implementing and evaluating the program. Following successful pilot testing, the program was publicly announced in September 1983 and met with an immediately enthusiastic response. Thirty-six partnerships were established in the first year and 24 more were added by April 1 of the second year. More than half of the district's students had received direct benefits by June 1, 1984. Program evaluations by the partners were uniformly favorable and all of the partnerships were renewed or expanded for 1984-85. (PGD)

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PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

Project Summary

"Partners in Education" is the name given to the partnership program between the School District of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and business, industry and the community. Through a series of formalized partnerships, the schools receive assistance in the form of time, services and expertise; in return, the schools provide business and industry with educational services to meet needs they have.

The overall goal of the program is to develop a closer working relationship between business, industry, the community and the schools for the mutual benefit of each. In establishing the goal, it was recognized that there has been a long history of cooperation and volunteer programs involving the community, business and the schools. Enlisting the active participation and involvement of business, industry and the community has proven over the years to be a most rewarding and effective way of gaining understanding and support for the schools. As a way of building on this background, the goal was defined in terms of the relationship to be established rather than the dollars or dollar value of goods and services that the schools might receive.

At the start of the planning process, four objectives were established. The first was to identify areas in which the partners might meaningfully interact. The others involved determining the procedures to be used in developing the partnerships, and how to implement and evaluate the program.

One of the first steps was to contact the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce and Industry. They were enthusiastic about the idea and pledged their support. Throughout the planning process, a committee comprised of members of the Chamber and the District met periodically to exchange ideas. Four pilot partnerships were established with local businesses to test the partnership concept. During this period, the District hired a coordinator of partnership affairs on a part-time basis.

The first public announcement of the "Partners in Education" program was made in September, 1983, in conjunction with a business exposition held in Lancaster. In addition to coverage provided by the media, four-color brochures and packets of introductory materials were distributed to businesses and industrial firms in the area. Some companies already working closely with the District were contacted individually and invited to participate. The response from the business community was immediate and supportive. Within a short period of time, it was obvious that the job of the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent for Partnerships would be a full-time position.

All of the partnerships are created on the basis of written agreements. The months of advance planning and experience gained with the pilot partnerships had given the District the opportunity to prepare many of the forms, documents and letters that would be used in establishing and maintaining the

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partnerships. The need for other kinds of communication tools soon became apparent. A "Partnership Alert" form was developed for use in the schools to note the availability of partnership opportunities or to indicate needs in the buildings or classrooms to potential partners. As the program got underway, additional in-service orientation was provided inside the District. A newsletter was developed during the first year as a way of communicating with everyone involved in the program. What proved most time-consuming, however, were the administrative details of the partnerships, including the coordination of the many events and programs.

A total of 36 partnerships were established during the first year, and 24 more were added by April 1 of the second year. Not all of them were with business and industry, for interest was also expressed by government agencies and social service agencies. Some of the partnerships involved no direct requests for District services; others did. As of June 1, 1984, there had been partnership involvement in every one of the District's 17 schools and in most of its program areas. More than half of the District's 10,090 students from kindergarten through grade 12 had received direct benefit from the program. In the second year of the program, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of students who benefited from individualized or small group participation as a result of the partnership program.

Evaluation forms were sent to each partner who had participated in the program in June, 1984. Each partnership was evaluated in accordance with the stated objectives and activities proposed in the partnership agreement. In addition, principals, teachers, and program coordinators were asked to review the program from their perspectives. Both sets of evaluations then became a part of the final evaluation prepared by the partnership office. The evaluations were uniformly favorable, and 100% of the partnerships renewed or expanded their involvement for the 1984-85 school year.

Further input was obtained through a luncheon held at the end of the year for partners and District administrators. While recognition occurs at several points during the business or industry partnership, the luncheon was an opportunity to say thank you formally by giving each partner a framed certificate of appreciation from the District.

From the standpoint of the School District of Lancaster, the "Partners in Education" program has more than met its goal of establishing solid relationships between business, industry, the community and the schools. The students have had many opportunities they would not otherwise have had, and those partners requesting reciprocal services had those services tailored to meet their individual needs. If it can be said that partnerships work best when everyone gains, the experience of the School District of Lancaster has been that it is the children who come out on top.